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MEMORIAL

OF

E. H. ANGAMAR,

RELATIVE TO THE

NAVIGATION OF OLD RIVER,

TO THE

LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF LOUISIANA.

MARCH, 1861.

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MEMORIAL.

THE channel through which the Atchafalaya and the Red Rivers communicate with the Mississippi, known by the name of Old River, has been filling up ever since 1831.

That channel was, in 1831, ninety feet deep; it is now about seven feet deep; and last summer, there was, at one time, only fifteen inches of water over the bar.

The forcible consequence of that constant filling up is, that within a very short time (perhaps this very year), the navigation of Old River will be entirely destroyed at low-water.

Some persons say, that the cry of the impending destruction of navigation in Old River has been so often repeated, for the last fifteen years, without the ominous event ever taking place as yet, that they do not believe such a fact will ever be realized.

These persons are mistaken; and forget, or never knew, the past history of that navigation, for were they to make any researches about it, they would find out that said navigation would have been destroyed long since, was it not for the temporary reliefs applied to it at different times and in different ways, either by appropriations of money by the State, or by the use and work of dredge boats, as well as by cut-offs: and we are within the truth when we assert, that at least $80,000 have already been spent on it. In 1845 and 1846, the navigation of Old River was on the eve of being entirely suspended, when the then Board of Public Works proposed and executed the Raccourci Cut-off. Governor P. O. Hebert, then State Engineer, opposed that measure very strenuously, and stated at the time, that the relief so afforded to the navigation, would have temporary effect only, and that, within a few years, the Mississippi River would resume its old level, and fill up, again, the gorges of Old River. (See Reports of 1846 and 1847.)

The predictions of the far-seeing Engineer have, unluckily, been realized, and now the prospects of losing all water communication between the two rivers, are more threatening than ever: for, from reliable soundings taken

and communicated to us very recently by respectable pilots, we are informed that the channel is, at this very moment, filling up more than usual in high water, and that if the Mississippi and Red Rivers happens to fall at the same time this summer, all water communication between them will be entirely cut off this year. (A')

(B'') This opinion is not ours alone, it is also the opinion of all the practical men, pilots, captains, and engineers, who have examined seriously into the matter.

(A'') After the low-water communication is destroyed, the filling up at high-water will go on at an increased rate, and in no distant period, even the high-water communication, between the two rivers, will be entirely destroyed. (B')

The longer we wait before taking action in this matter, the greater the difficulty of restoring the navigation, and the greater also will be the cost. The eventful result is before us; is it not wise and proper to apply the remedy in time, especially, if we take notice that the works necessary to effect the desired object will require, at least, two or three years before they can be carried to completion.

Then do we say again, something must be done in the premises, and the sooner the better; for this is not a question of low-water navigation only, but a question of high-water communication also; for, as we have said above, the communication being once totally interrupted at low-water, the communication during high-water will soon be destroyed also. Such has been the result in the case of all cut-offs, and there is not the least reason why that should be otherwise in the present case. On the contrary, full and positive evidence is before us of the tendency of the upper channel of Old River becoming entirely separated from the Mississippi in the same way as the lower channel now is.

And now comes this question: Which is the best and cheapest mode of executing the works that will prevent the threatening destruction of water communication, and insure the needed navigation in a permanent manner? Shall the State undertake the works herself, or shall she entrust their execution to a company who will do it out of their own funds for a compensation?

A very important question of expenditure has to be incurred in executing the works, and because Louisiana is not the only party interested in the matter. Texas and Arkansas are equally so; for out of the 500,000 bales of cotton shipped annually through Old River, about 210,000 bales are the growth of our State; the balance being raised and shipped by the States of Texas and Arkansas. Then, it follows that Texas and Arkansas ought to participate in the expense, and here springs this question: How can it be done? We have no power to tax them directly. So it is. But, if we cannot tax them directly, we can do so indirectly, in entrusting the under-

taking to a company who will collect their revenues from the very freight benefitted by the improvement, and who will, in that way, obtain the object that the State herself could not accomplish, that is, force Texas and Arkansas to pay for their share of the improvement.

Some parties may, at first sight, object to the establishing of tolls, because it looks like a tax; others are of the opinion, that this being a measure of public improvement, the State should pay herself for the whole expense, and let the navigation remain free. But the intended toll is so light that, on account of the facilities afforded to the navigation by the improvement, it is almost certain that steamboats will assume and pay themselves the light toll to be levied on the produce carried by them, without charging for it, as is the case in almost every similar instance; and, besides, the improvement in navigation thus afforded, will do away with the high rates of freight during low-water.

But even should it be a tax, it is to our interest to submit to it, for we are on the eve of losing the navigation of Old River, and we must not, we cannot, allow such a result to take place; and hence the unanimous opinion of the people, that something must be done in the premises, and done soon, at whatever cost; and, if we judge of the public opinion by the acts of the Legislature, we may say that this question has been before the people every year since 1856.

As the idea of charging tolls on freight might be construed as imposing an extra tax on cotton, let us examine the expense to be borne by the interested parishes, in case of the works being executed by the State, and in case they be entrusted to and performed by a company.

By so doing we will arrive at a perfect understanding of the question.

In case the State is to execute the works, she must raise the money necessary to carry them through, and she has no other means to raise it except by way of taxation.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the works will cost $500,000, and that the State execute the works.

Twenty-five parishes of the State are, more or less, interested in this matter, to-wit: Avoyelles, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Claiborne, DeSoto, Franklin, Jackson, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Rapides, Sabine, St. Landry, Union and Winn for the whole of their shipments, and Concordia, Lafayette, Madison, St. Mary, St. Martin, Tensas and Vermillion for part of their shipments.

As those parishes represent a little over two-fifths of the whole taxation of the State, they will have to pay towards the completion of the works, in the shape of taxes, the sum of about two fifths of the entire sum, say $200,000: and the remaining three-fifths, or $300,000, will have to be paid by the other parishes of the State, although they be not at all interested in the matter, and although they do not derive the least benefit from the works of improvement.

Should, on the contrary, the works be executed by a company, what proportion of the expense has to be borne by the aforesaid twenty-five parishes? Exactly the very same amount as in the case of the State performing the works herself, for the reason that these twenty-five parishes shipping through that channel only two-fifths of the whole produce passing that way, they will have to pay two-fifths only of the expenditure, or $200,000; here comes the difference between the two plans, to-wit: the remaining three-fifths, or $300,000, instead of being taken from the pockets of the balance of our own citizens who have no direct interest in the matter, and who derive no benefit at all from the expenditure, will be collected from the people of Texas and Arkansas, who derive the full benefit of the improvement; thereby saving to our own people the payment of a tax of $300,000.

From the above it appears, that in having the proposed improvement executed by a company, the State saves three-fifths of the total expenditure, or $300,000.

From the above it appears also that the toll proposed to be levied by the company will not, in any way, augment the taxes of the parishes interested in the improvement, since they will pay under the name of tolls the very same amount of money they would have otherwise to pay under the name and shape of taxes.

Then, since the company can secure the navigation for two-fifths of the amount of money that it would cost the State, if the State was to undertake it, and since those of our parishes who will be taxed in the shape of tolls for the payment of the improvement, will be made to pay only the same amount of money as they would have to pay if the State was to execute the works, the balance of the cost of the improvement being collected by the company from people foreign to us, it is evident that the works should be entrusted to a company; in so doing we save our own people from paying a tax which we set on strangers, and still we derive the full benefit of the improvement. Besides, as we have stated before, there is a very strong probability that owing to the greater facilities of navigation brought on by the improvement to navigation, and owing also to the competition between steamboats and railroads, steamboats will assume and pay the toll to be charged on freight without charging for it.

It is a matter of policy admitted by all nations now that all works of such a nature as this, are more cheaply and properly carried on by private companies than by States, and there can be no doubt that such will be the result in this case.

Herewith I respectfully submit the project of an act for the incorporation of the Old River Navigation Company, the most striking feature of which is, that whenever it will be the pleasure of our Legislature to free the Louisiana grown cotton from toll, for one or more years, they are empowered to do so by making an appropriation sufficient only to pay to the company

the amount of tolls that would accrue to them for one or more years from Louisiana grown cotton; in other words, let us suppose that this year's Louisiana grown cotton crop amounts to 100,000 bales, and that the toll be ten cents per bale, then should this Legislature pay over to the company $10,000, the Louisiana cotton would be allowed to pass free for next year; and next year the same thing might be done again, if desired, it not, not.

Another very striking feature of the bill, by which any and all the objections that might be entertained against it ought to be pacified is, that it is not a peremptory, but a provisional and conditional bill only, for it cannot take effect until the next session of the Legislature, on whom will devolve the responsibility of approving, amending, or repealing it; thereby referring the whole matter to the people, who, between this and the election in November next, will have an opportunity of studying the matter, and of instructing their Representatives elected by them, how to act in the premises.

As the originator of the proposed company, and as a citizen deeply interested in the navigation of Old River, I do most respectfully demand that the subject of this communication should at least receive, at the hands of the Legislature, the serious attention and examination it deserves, and that some action of some kind be taken in the premises, for wether the idea of entrusting the works to a company be entertained by our Legislature or not, the Legislatures of Texas and Arkansas should be consulted in order to ascertain whether they would or not assist in some shape, in accomplishing the needed improvement, and it may be more than a year before they can be made to act in the matter. Their concurrence in the expense would be so much saved to our State, and, therefore, I beg to suggest and recommend the propriety of passing a joint resolution authorizing the Governor of the State to appoint a Commissioner, representing the State of Louisiana, for the purpose of waiting on the Legislatures of Texas and Arkansas, conferring with them, and soliciting their co-operation in this matter. Said Commissioner to report to the Legislature at its next session, the result of his mission. Said Commissioner to receive no pay or compensations of any kind for his services, but to be entitled to mileage.

E. H. ANGAMAR.

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